

9 Honors – Fallon

A Raisin in the Sun Reading Guide

*"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?"*

Langston Hughes

Directions: Answer questions in notes form. (Reading Guide is available on my website.)

Act 1, Scene 1

1. Describe the Younger's apartment. What is the setting? What details show that the apartment is crowded? What does the setting add to the story?
2. What does the small window and sunshine symbolize?
3. Who is Ruth? Give an example from the text (quotes) of direct and indirect characterization.
4. What is the implied conflict between Ruth and Walter?
5. What is Walter's motivation for giving Travis the extra money? Why was Ruth upset by this? (Look beyond the literal.)
6. Who are Willy and Bobo?
7. Why does Walter say, "Damn my eggs...damn all the eggs that ever was!"?
8. Who is Beneatha? Give examples (quotes) of direct and indirect characterization.
9. Why was Mama getting a check for \$10,000?
10. Why did Beneatha say she would not marry George?
11. Mama slaps Beneatha after Beneatha declares her belief that God does not exist? Why?
12. Why does Beneatha want to take guitar lessons? What can you infer from this about her?

Act 1, Scene 2

1. Who is Joseph Asagai? Give examples (quotes) of direct and indirect characterization.
2. What does the rat symbolize?
3. What does the Nigerian outfit that Asagai gives Beneatha symbolize?
4. What is the nickname that Asagai gives Beneatha? Why it is appropriate?
5. What are Ruth's motivations for having an abortion? (stated and implied)
6. What are the stated and implied causes for Mama's sadness when she receives the check for \$10,000?
7. Why does Mama call Walter a disgrace to his father's memory? Describe Mama and Walter's relationship?

Act 2, Scene 1

1. Describe the scene before George walks in on the Younger family. What is the mood?
2. Is George a likable character? Why or why not? Compare George to Asagai. How do they differ?
3. How does the mood change when George tells Beneatha to change out of the Nigerian robes?
4. What do we learn when Beneatha removes her headdress?
5. What does Walter make fun of on Beneatha's date? Why do you think he does this?
6. What expectations do George and Asagai have of women?

Act 2, Scene 2

1. What is Mrs. Johnson's reaction to the Younger's move? Is she a likable character? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Walter spends so much time drinking?
3. What is Mama's motivation in splitting up the insurance check? How does she split it up?

Act 2, Scene 3

1. What is the mood at the start of Act 2, Scene 3?
2. Who is Karl Linder and why does he visit the Younger's house? What is Linder's approach to getting what he wants?
3. What was Walter's reaction to Linder?
4. Why does the mood shift at the end of the scene?

Act 3

1. Why doesn't Beneatha want to be a doctor anymore?
2. How does Asagai define "idealists" and "realists"?
3. Why does Beneatha choose Asagai over George?
4. Why does Mama scold Beneatha for her bitter mockery of Walter and ask her to love her brother?
5. What fault does Mama find with herself?
6. How does Walter regain his pride and become a man?

Final Discussion: *Prepare notes for the discussion questions below.*

1. Are the characters in *RIS* stereotypes? If so, explain the usefulness of employing stereotypes in the story. If not, explain how they merit individuality.
2. What function does the character of Travis serve in the play?
3. Explain how the names used in the play are appropriate.
4. Is the story *RIS* believable? Why or why not?
5. **Generation Gap:** "Once upon a time freedom used to be life- now it's money. I guess the world really do change," says Mama in Act I. This is a play very much about the clash of generations. How are both Beneatha and Walter different from their mother in their outlook on life? What values does Mama manage to instill in them by the end of the play? How does this affect the generation gap?
6. **Themes** *A Raisin in the Sun* is a play about an African American family in Chicago. Yet, many critics believe that what makes it an enduring work of art is that it is about universal values that touch all people, regardless of race and class. Do you agree with this evaluation?

